

UNPUBLISHED DESCRIPTIONS OF WESTERN MEDIEVAL MANUSCRIPTS AT CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY LIBRARY*

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There remains, as yet, no catalogue of the western medieval manuscript collections at Cambridge University Library that comprehensively supersedes that published between 1856 and 1867.¹ Three recent publications have addressed substantial parts of these holdings: the English legal manuscripts, the Additional manuscripts acquired before 1940, and the illuminated manuscripts.² A variety of other ‘class catalogues’ have also made available descriptions of the material characteristics, textual and decorative contents and provenance of selected books alongside those in other collections, in Cambridge or elsewhere.³ The researcher is thus presented with a range of published reference works that overlap with one another to varying degrees, where they might find a manuscript has been described once, multiple times but with different emphases, or not at all.

* My thanks to Jayne Ringrose, Suzanne Paul and Jean-Pascal Pouzet for their helpful comments on an earlier draft of this article, as well as participants in the Cambridge Medieval Palaeography Workshop, to whom a display of these materials was presented in May 2019. Any remaining errors remain my own. All references are to collection items at Cambridge University Library, unless stated otherwise. For the sake of brevity, citations give the classmark of the manuscript to which an unpublished description refers. Archival references for each collection of unpublished descriptions are provided at the end, with full listings by file now available on the University Library’s online archival catalogue, ArchiveSearch: <https://archivesearch.lib.cam.ac.uk>

¹ H. R. Luard (ed.), *A catalogue of the manuscripts preserved in the library of the University of Cambridge*, 6 vols. (Cambridge, 1856–67).

² J. H. Baker and J. S. Ringrose, *A catalogue of English legal manuscripts in Cambridge University Library, with codicological descriptions of the early manuscripts* (Woodbridge, 1996); J. S. Ringrose, *Summary catalogue of the Additional medieval manuscripts in Cambridge University Library acquired before 1940* (Woodbridge, 2009); P. Binski and P. Zutshi, *Western illuminated manuscripts: a catalogue of the collection in Cambridge University Library* (Cambridge, 2011).

³ For example: N. R. Ker, *Catalogue of manuscripts containing Anglo-Saxon* (Oxford, 1957); P. R. Robinson, *Catalogue of dated and datable manuscripts c. 737–1600 in Cambridge libraries*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, 1988); M. Connolly, *The Index of Middle English Prose handlist XIX: Manuscripts in the University Library, Cambridge (Dd–Oo)* (Cambridge, 2009).

What he or she is unlikely to be aware of is the existence of a substantial cache of unpublished descriptions, produced in stages during the twentieth century, by various members of library staff and manuscript scholars.

In 1911, the Library's Annual Report noted of the 1856–67 catalogue that 'although it contained much excellent work, it needs revision and correction to bring it up to the standard now expected of such catalogues'.⁴ This set in motion the first of several attempts to prepare fresh descriptions of the University Library's western medieval manuscripts: first, by Charles Sayle, who had worked since 1903 on descriptions of recent acquisitions in the Additional classmark sequence, and who continued with manuscripts in the two-letter classmark sequence until around the close of 1920; by M.R. James between 1926 and 1930; by Basil Atkinson, perhaps contemporaneously with James but more likely afterwards, and intermittently until his retirement in 1960; by Arthur Owen from 1948 to 1949 and perhaps again after his return to the Library in 1961; and by Harold Pink, from 1948 until his retirement in 1970, initially under some supervision by Roger Mynors (who also contributed descriptions, presumably up to his return to Oxford in 1953).⁵

⁴ Cambridge University Archives (henceforth UA) ULIB 1/1/2, *Annual Report 1911*, p. 10. The Catalogue had been out of print since 1893, after a fire at the University Press had destroyed the stock of sheets. On the troubled endeavour to catalogue the Library's manuscripts in the nineteenth century, its various personnel, examples of its errors, and an assessment of its achievements, see: D. McKitterick, *Cambridge University Library: a history. Vol. 2: the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries* (Cambridge, 1986), 543–51. The catalogue's general editor, H. R. Luard, was aware of the necessity to emend it, noting over several years corrections and bibliographical updates to many descriptions in his own copy, now Adv.c.87.1–7 (for further details, see below). Around 1868, shortly after the issue of the index volume, Luard also compiled a list of incipits for manuscripts in classes Dd, Ee and Ff, now MS Add. 3014. It is not known at present whether Luard's work continued beyond this.

⁵ Sayle compiled notes on and James produced some descriptions of Greek manuscripts, however work on this part of the collection ceased until Richard Kerr (who had arrived at the Library in 1948) was appointed in May 1968 to work specifically on this subset of the collection (see UA ULIB 1/10/8, *Departmental Reports 1968–69*, pp. 63–64). These have been accessioned into the University Archives along with the other unpublished descriptions: details below. However, since departmental records and reports for the period during which Kerr worked remain closed under the terms of the Data Protection Act, description of his activities will require separate treatment at some later date. In any case, Kerr's work will shortly be wholly superseded by that of Erika Elia, Matteo di Franco and Christopher Wright, as part of the Polonsky Foundation Greek Manuscripts Project. For further details, see: <https://www.lib.cam.ac.uk/collections/departments/manuscripts-university-archives/subject-guides/medieval-manuscripts/polonsky> (accessed 16 December 2020).

None of their work made it directly to press. Instead, there was left behind by each a corpus of handwritten descriptions that until now have been kept, uncatalogued and unaccessioned, within the Department of Manuscripts (now the Department of Rare Books and Early Manuscripts). This article sets out the context in which this work took place, as far as is possible from evidence within the descriptions themselves and the scant administrative record available in the University Archives; summarises the scope of the work; and gives insights into the storage and use of the descriptions.⁶ The focus here is solely upon work undertaken to describe the medieval manuscripts, and by each of these men in turn. However, no such distinction was initially observed in the Library's operations, the handwritten descriptions showing that Sayle's and Atkinson's work ranged over post-medieval manuscripts as well.⁷ Only with Pink's promotion in the Department of Manuscripts in October 1947 did there arise a general divergence in responsibilities, reflected in him submitting his own annual progress reports from 1950–51 onwards, separate to those of Atkinson and later Owen.⁸ Nor did each cataloguer work in isolation, but to varying degrees collaborated with their contemporaries and drew upon descriptions prepared by their predecessors.⁹

Since descriptions that have not been superseded by later publications may contain information that is still useful to the researcher, steps have now been taken to ensure their preservation by formal accession into the University Archives, among records of the administration of the University

⁶ So far, only the work of M. R. James has been dealt with in detail, thanks to Richard Pfaff and Jayne Ringrose: the circumstances in which he agreed to compose a descriptive catalogue of certain manuscripts at Cambridge University Library, the logistical arrangements made to facilitate his work, and the failure after his death to render the descriptions in print. See: R. W. Pfaff, *Montague Rhodes James* (London, 1980), 325–30; J. Ringrose, 'The legacy of M.R. James in Cambridge University Library', in L. Dennison (ed.), *The legacy of M.R. James: papers from the 1995 Cambridge symposium* (Donington, 2001), 23–36.

⁷ Although, latterly, the handwritten descriptions of the post-medieval manuscripts have been stored separately from those of the medieval manuscripts and remain in the Manuscripts Reading Room at the time of writing.

⁸ See, for example: UA ULIB 1/10/3, p. 10; UA ULIB 1/10/6, p. 52.

⁹ For example, pre-printed and lined foolscap sheets were produced for M. R. James's use, with basic bibliographical information filled in beforehand by Atkinson. James was also given access to Sayle's draft descriptions. See: Ringrose, 'Legacy', 28. Many of James's drafts were later annotated and amended by Pink, Owen and others.

Library (UA ULIB). They will henceforth be available to order and consult in the Manuscripts Reading Room. They also possess a value greater than the sum of their parts, as witnesses both to the development of the discipline of manuscript description during the twentieth century and to successive attempts over seven decades by the Library to manage and make available its collection of medieval manuscripts—attempts that met with very qualified success.

C. E. Sayle

Charles Sayle had first been employed by the University Library in 1893, to produce a catalogue of its early English printed books, the final volume of which was published in 1907.¹⁰ As the index volume went to press and his labour on that project began to wind down, Sayle was given the task in 1903 of cataloguing western manuscripts in the Additional sequence that had been acquired by the Library since the completion of the old catalogue in 1867.¹¹ By 1911, however, his remit had been broadened to include manuscripts in the two-letter class, the Syndicate having, the previous year, approved his appointment as Additional Under-Librarian for a period of ten years.¹²

¹⁰ C. Sayle, *Early English printed books in the University Library, Cambridge (1475 to 1640)*, 4 vols. (Cambridge, 1900–1907). For accounts of Sayle's life, bibliographical work and literary activities, see: A. W. Pollard, 'Charles Sayle I', *The Library*, 4th ser., 5 (1924), 267–70, <https://doi.org/10.1093/library/s4-V.3.267> (accessed 16 April 2020); A. C. Benson, 'Charles Sayle II', *The Library*, 4th ser., 5 (1924), 271–3, <https://doi.org/10.1093/library/s4-V.3.271> (accessed 16 Apr. 2020); G. J. Gray, 'The writings of Charles Sayle', *The Library*, 4th ser., 6 (1925), 82–9, <https://doi.org/10.1093/library/s4-VI.1.82> (accessed 16 Apr. 2020); J. C. T. Oates, 'Charles Edward Sayle', *Transactions of the Cambridge Bibliographical Society*, 8 (1982), 236–69, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41154610> (accessed 16 Apr. 2020).

¹¹ UA ULIB 1/1/2, *Annual Report 1904*, p. 5; ULIB 7/3/72/1: Sayle noted on a sheet at the beginning of these descriptions: 'C. Sayle "asked to catalogue the Additional Western MSS" in 1903 (CUR 19 May 1910, p. 989)'—which tallies with the date of 17 March 1903 recorded by Sayle at the commencement of his work on the index of 'Owners and Donors'. For further details of this and other indexing undertaken by Sayle and his successors, see below.

¹² UA ULIB 1/1/2, *Annual Report 1911*, p. 10; *Annual Report 1910*, p. 3. Accordingly, there is at the beginning of the unpublished descriptions compiled by Sayle and other hands a sheet of paper entitled by him 'Catalogue of Western MSS' and dated '15 July 1911': UA ULIB 7/3/72/1.

However, a variety of other projects encroached upon Sayle's time with the manuscripts.¹³ His mounting frustration emerges from notes in his hand, entitled 'Catalogue of Western MSS'. 'The question of the state of the catalogue of Western MSS has been reopened,' Sayle wrote, noting six possible options considered by the Library in 1916, their submission to M. R. James and his offer to complete the work, and the Library's decision to defer in the immediate aftermath of the Armistice. Characteristically keen to record his own contribution, Sayle noted, probably on 30 November 1920:

The work of revision, actually, extended only as far as Dd.3.64 among the earlier collection of manuscripts. The preparation of the full catalogue of Additional Manuscripts has extended to Add. 4541. But no opportunity is lost of acquiring information about all the manuscripts, and recording it. This, with the incessant interruption caused by the simultaneous control of Early English, & Irish books, children's books, liturgies, catalogues,

¹³ These included: a catalogue of Henry Bradshaw's collection of Irish books, apparently commenced in 1908 and published in 1916; preparation for the press, between 1915 and 1917, of a separate catalogue of the collection given by Samuel Sandars; and an illustrated book on bindings in Cambridge libraries that was left incomplete at his death in 1924. His *Annals of Cambridge University Library, 1278–1900* was also published during this period, in 1916. See: UA ULIB 1/1/2, *Annual Report 1916*, p. 5; *Annual Report 1915*, p. 9; *Annual Report 1917*, p. 8; UA ULIB 1/1/3, *Annual Report 1923–24*, p. 1. A notebook belonging to Sayle, containing his notes towards a catalogue of bindings, remains in the Rare Books offices. It appears to have been kept mainly between 10 October 1906 and 1 November 1921 and falls into two roughly equal parts: English bindings and foreign bindings. Some entries are pertinent to the bindings of University Library manuscripts, but evidence has yet to be found that proves its use by any of the subsequent cataloguers during the twentieth century. Its contents were, however, used and acknowledged by G. D. Hobson in his own work: *Bindings in Cambridge libraries: seventy-two plates, with notes; based on researches by N. F. Banwell, H. M. Davies and Charles E. Sayle* (Cambridge, 1929), vii–viii. MS Add. 10277, another of Sayle's notebooks, contains further scattered notes on bindings by him as well as a number of sketches of bookstamps, and a rubbing, taken from the covers of University Library books. It is one of three notebooks (the others being MSS Add. 10278 and 10279) that bear partially printed spine labels with the classmark 'Res' (for 'Residuum'), which appear to have lain for some time in the Old Library before being transferred to the new building in 1936. They contain few notes relating to the manuscript collections and where they were kept and to what uses (if any) they were put is similarly unclear. Other items found to bear similar 'Res' labels include notebooks and other materials bequeathed by E. G. Duff (for example, Add. 8593–8602, 8606–8628), Francis Jenkinson's diaries (Add. MSS 8728–8761) and those of Sayle himself (MSS Add. 8510), plus another of Sayle's notebooks, entitled 'Musica Cantabrigiensis' (Add. MSS 8511).

bindings, Documents, Broad-sides, Portraits, Topography, gifts, special collections, such as Sandars, Buxton, Murray, etc. and finally since the death of Mr Aldis of the oriental manuscripts; together with the loss of time entailed in replacing books; and in heraldic enquiries inevitably brings actual progress to a standstill.¹⁴

Sayle's note echoes the Annual Report for 1911: he had been tasked with 'examining each manuscript afresh, and also incorporating such additions and corrections as have been noted in the various Library copies during the last fifty years'—which copies are listed in another note by Sayle's hand.¹⁵

Corrigenda extracted from Bradshaw I [MS Add. 2842.o Adv]¹⁶

Bradshaw II [MS Add. 2842.a–w Adv]¹⁷

Θ copy of Catalogue¹⁸

Luard copy of Catalogue¹⁹

Jenkinson copy of Catalogue

Paul Meyer KR.14.85²⁰

Not yet inserted: M. R. James, Libraries, p. 545 [887.c.13]

¹⁴ UA ULIB 7/3/72/1. Except for '30 Novemb' written at the head, the sheet bearing these notes is undated. They were likely written in 1920: a sheet now immediately before it contains a note in Sayle's hand—'RULES for the new edition'—and is dated 29 June 1920. The current order of these documents may be artificial, however, and there is nothing to preclude Sayle's note being of a still earlier date. The reference to 'Mr Aldis' (presumably H. G. Aldis, 1863–1919, the Library's first Secretary) suggests a *terminus ante quem non* of 1919. Also among these papers is a first draft of the six options, in Sayle's hand, dated 10 August 1916, followed by a note of James's response dated four days later, and finally at the foot the statement 'The question was reopened by A. F. Scholfield' dated 27 November 1920. For further details, see below.

¹⁵ UA ULIB 7/3/72/1. A further copy of the catalogue, perhaps formerly that belonging to Room Theta and since then the departmental reference copy, and in very poor condition after decades of heavy use, was annotated by Sayle (who inscribed his name in the third volume) and many other hands.

¹⁶ Now Adv.c.77.52, a copy of volumes 1–4, covering the two-letter manuscripts Dd–Oo, bound into a single volume and presented to Bradshaw by the Library Syndics, 11th December 1861.

¹⁷ Now Adv.c.77.39–48, a copy of volumes 1–4, interleaved and divided into separate volumes by classmark.

¹⁸ 'Θ' referring to Room Theta, the room in which early books and manuscripts were consulted in the Old Library.

¹⁹ Now Adv.c.87.1–6. Luard's copy of the catalogue of adversaria is now Adv.c.87.7.

²⁰ P. Meyer, 'Les manuscrits français de Cambridge. II. Bibliothèque de l'université', *Romania*, 15 (1886), 237–357.

The aggregation of information about the entire collection was undertaken in parallel with the composition of detailed and structured descriptions. One or more sheets of foolscap paper was assigned to each manuscript, with the classmark written at the head, usually by Sayle.²¹ The size category into which the manuscript was placed was also noted at the head, in brackets: AA (the largest) down to H (the smallest).²² Onto these sheets were compiled references to relevant sources of corrigenda, and copies of descriptions from the nineteenth-century catalogue were often pasted in at the end or on adjoining sheets or were kept together as loose leaves alongside the foolscap drafts. Interspersed among these sheets are many scraps of paper that bear notes by numerous, mostly anonymous, hands, apparently gathered together by Sayle or another member of staff as part of his work. They suggest that attempts to accumulate further information about the manuscripts had been ongoing, however haphazardly, long before Sayle's work began (and presumably in anticipation of the publication of revisions in the future).

The order, layout and level of detail in Sayle's descriptions suggests that the published catalogues of M. R. James served as a rough template. Work on the two-letter manuscripts began once the Additional had been completed—but since none of the descriptions is dated, we cannot reconstruct the order or rate of Sayle's cataloguing. No further descriptions by his hand are found beyond MS Dd.3.53 (that for MS Dd.3.64 has not been located), suggesting that his composition of descriptions ceased in late 1920. Dates added by Sayle to a handlist in three volumes, entitled 'Catalogue of Western Manuscripts', range between 30 November 1920

²¹ While many sheets contain Sayle's hand, only those bearing substantial descriptions by him have been noted in the concordance of unpublished descriptions (for further details of which, see below).

²² This practice is preserved to this day, along with a large wooden rule known as the 'stick', which is used to measure new acquisitions and assign them a size category.

and 12 March 1923, however a further annotation dated 22 August 1923 suggests that his activities continued at least until several months before his death.²³

M. R. James

Although Sayle's appointment in 1903 was initially to produce descriptions of the Additional manuscripts, discussions concerning the inadequacy of the old catalogue as a whole were current around that time. As Richard Pfaff noted, M. R. James had drafted an appeal to the University as early as 1904 that more funding be allocated to the Library in order to support its wholesale revision: '...the general catalogue of our MSS is not only a rare book,' James wrote, '...but is also, with all respect to the compilers be it said, not abreast of the increased knowledge of the present day'.²⁴ Both Pfaff and Ringrose attribute to Alwyn Faber Scholfield, and to his connection with James, the development of concrete proposals to involve James in the recataloguing of the Library's medieval books—a project that ultimately commenced in 1926, three years after Scholfield's appointment as Librarian. However, notes by Sayle record the involvement of James in preliminary discussions three years before Scholfield's return from India and appointment as Librarian at Trinity College:

In 1916 six lines of action were suggested:

1. A revised reprint of the six volumes 1856–67.
2. A continuation of this on the same lines.
3. Summary catalogue of all MSS.

²³ UA ULIB 7/3/73. The handlist is ruled in a series of columns on the recto and verso of each leaf. It comprises, on the recto, a manuscript's running number, followed by brief, typically one-line entries on the contents of the manuscript (or more if further detail was required), together with its date of origin and the size of the item (according to the Library's own internal measurement system). On the verso, further summary information about the manuscript was recorded: provenance, languages, former classmarks and, occasionally, bibliographical references. The handlist contains a couple of annotations by the then Librarian, Alwyn Faber Scholfield, including one to the 'title-page' of the first volume that attributed the work to Sayle after his death in 1924. There are further, scattered notes and corrections by B. F. C. Atkinson, including a bibliographical reference to R. T. Gunther, *Early science in Cambridge*, indicating the handlist's use in the Department of Manuscripts until at least 1937.

²⁴ Pfaff, 326. Unfortunately, no reference to the source for this letter is provided.

4. Summary catalogue of the new Additional MSS.
5. Full catalogue of the Sandars MSS.
6. Charters and Rolls. A separate volume.

This statement was submitted to Dr M. R. James. He expressed unhesitating approval of Nos 1, 2, 5, and 6.

Dr James became Provost of Eton in 1918. He offered then to complete his work on Cambridge MSS by recataloguing the University Collection, if the volumes were committed, a few at a time, to him at Eton.²⁵

Pfaff also suggested that discussions between James and Scholfield likely began in autumn 1925, when James wrote to Scholfield with a proposed procedure for transporting the manuscripts back and forth and the production of a pre-printed template which could be partially completed by a Library assistant.²⁶ According to another note by Sayle, though, 'The question [was] reopened by A. F. Scholfield' on or just before 27 November 1920.²⁷ Scholfield may also have been involved—though they are in Sayle's hand—in the preparation of 'RULES for the new edition', dated 29 June 1920, stating the order in which descriptive information should be presented. The context in which these discussions took place was likely informal, since record of them is found neither among the Annual Reports nor among the minutes of the Library Syndicate, on which Scholfield then sat.²⁸

Over the course of four or so years, from around June 1926 to October 1930, James produced descriptions of over 1,200 of the Library's manuscripts.²⁹ Both Pfaff and Ringrose have provided accounts of this undertaking, highlighting both the (regrettable) speed with which he

²⁵ UA ULIB 7/3/72/1. A draft version of this note also survives, which dates the drawing up of the six 'Alternative views' to 10 August 1916, and the receipt of James's response to these four days later.

²⁶ This work was ultimately undertaken by Basil Atkinson: Pfaff, 326–7; Ringrose, 'Legacy', 25–8. See below for further details.

²⁷ It was this that presumably prompted Sayle to cease work on composing descriptions and begin the compilation of the handlist mentioned above three days later.

²⁸ For further details regarding Sayle's notes, see n. 14.

²⁹ At present count, the Library holds draft descriptions by James of some 977 manuscripts within the two-letter sequence and 241 within the Additional.

worked and the variations in their level of detail and accuracy.³⁰ Although his task was to update the old catalogue, James often recommended its contents be reprinted.³¹ His energies most frequently failed him with the collation of a manuscript.³² Both Paul Needham and Richard Beadle have come to the conclusion—to which these drafts lend further weight—that James ‘was not deeply interested in questions of book structure’ (Needham) and that he ‘never really grasped the potential intricacies of Bradshaw’s collational formulae, notwithstanding that it was he who first gave them widespread circulation’ (Beadle).³³ Indeed, his drafts make plain how frequently James deferred to Bradshaw, even when the work was

³⁰ As with his printed catalogues, James’s descriptions are characteristically idiosyncratic. Those manuscripts that caught his eye or appealed to his interests were given thoroughgoing descriptions; others received rather briefer treatment. For example, MS Dd.6.13: ‘A perfectly miscellaneous collection of medical recipes, some in a very messy[?] hand, but none earlier than cent. XVI’; its collation was ‘not worth making’. Another medical manuscript, MS Dd.10.44, was collated by James, but returned with no further notes besides ‘usual’ for the binding and ‘Moore’ for the provenance. The description of the bindings was frequently side-stepped. For MS Ff.1.23, James originally wrote ‘very fine & bold’, which he crossed out and replaced with ‘very fine Elizabethan: brown leather with copious gold tooling [...] (a description by an expert wanted)’. Others appear to have made the journey to Eton and back all but untouched by James’s hands: ‘Not worth describing’ (MS Add. 677) or ‘I will not do this horrid Book’ (MS Add. 1844). In one instance, the pre-printed form was never filled in: MS Dd.7.18, a glossed Decretals and papal constitutions made c. 1300, which had been in the Library since at least 1424. One of the larger manuscripts at the Library, this was perhaps never transported to Eton, but set aside instead for James to work on *in situ* at the University Library. James may also have chosen to exclude it as one of the legal manuscripts he had opted not to catalogue.

³¹ For example: ‘The description in the Old Catalogue, the work of (Dr) E.J.A. Hort is so full & excellent that it must be reproduced here. The small points may be added...’ (MS Ee.4.29); ‘The contents are fully calendared in the Old Catalogue (reprint)’, with a few notes about different readings or dating of inscriptions (MS Ll.2.15); or ‘The account of the contents in old catalogue (by Churchill Babington) is reprinted here’ (MS Ll.4.12).

³² For example: James abandoned the collation of MS Kk.6.30 at the first quire, crossing out the formula and writing simply: ‘a conglomerate of quires’. The collation of MS Add. 2936 was ‘impracticable’.

³³ P. Needham, *The Bradshaw method: Henry Bradshaw’s contribution to bibliography*, Hanes Lecture, 7 (Chapel Hill, 1988), 29–30; R. Beadle, *Henry Bradshaw and the foundations of codicology*, Sandars Lectures, 2015 (Foxton, 2017), 98.

straightforward.³⁴ Whereas James typically used either Arabic or Roman numerals to denote the quires in his own collation formulae, in cases where he relied on Bradshaw he employed precisely the same characters assigned by Bradshaw to each of the quires, deriving them either from a formula written at the rear of the book (as with MS Hh.6.11 and MS Add. 2827) or from Bradshaw's marks on the quires themselves.

James also had access to the descriptions written by Sayle and the miscellaneous notes compiled alongside them, since he made arrangements in a letter to Basil Atkinson dated 12 August 1932 for boxes containing them to be collected from Eton College.³⁵ What use, if any, he made of them is unclear, since he appears not to have systematically incorporated information in Sayle's descriptions into his own. For example, James overlooked a fifteenth-century obit written in plummet at the foot of fo. 133^r in MS Dd.1.30 that Sayle had recorded.³⁶ Nor did James record, as Sayle had, the presence of the signature 'Thomas Tomson' on fo. 32^r of MS Add. 2823.³⁷ As for textual contents, James did not always reproduce in full lists of contents that Sayle had compiled—for example, the names in the devotions in MS Add. 2877, and those in a copy of the martyrology of Usuard in MS Add. 2920—though he sometimes provided a more detailed description than his predecessor, as with his inventory of the sermons in Add. MS 2943. Features of the bindings detailed by Sayle—diagonal edge-sewing and vellum ties on MS Add. 2990, tooling on MS Add. 2991—were also sometimes omitted by James.

³⁴ For example: 'by Mr Bradshaw' (MS Hh.6.11), 'Mr Bradshaw' (Ii.2.19), 'Mr Bradshaw's' (MS Ii.2.24), 'as marked by Mr Bradshaw' (MS Kk.1.24), 'Mr Bradshaw's collation is this' (MS Add. 2827), or 'a full statement is given below' and, on a separate piece of paper, 'Mr Bradshaws statement of the collation & lacunae in the book is as follows' (MS Gg.4.27). In some instances, James overcame his initial misgivings, as for MS Kk.5.26, where he crossed out 'not important' and gave a full collation.

³⁵ CUL, MS Add. 9329/6; Ringrose, 'Legacy', 34. A collation formula for MS Ii.2.24 in Bradshaw's hand, written on a slip of paper affixed to the sheet of notes, may perhaps have been the source for James's formula, rather than the manuscript itself. Further examples may yet be found among the notes, but no comprehensive search has yet been undertaken.

³⁶ 'Anno dni millesimo cccc° xviii° obiit frater Johannes Punch'. It also appears only to have been incorporated as an afterthought into Atkinson's description. My thanks to Peter Jones for drawing this to my attention.

³⁷ Sayle dated this to the fifteenth century, however Jayne Ringrose dated it to the sixteenth century: Ringrose, *Summary catalogue*, 26.

These idiosyncrasies and the difficulty of deciphering James's handwriting notwithstanding, the descriptions that he did compile between 1926 and 1930 often represented a significant advance upon those published sixty or seventy years previously, but many were left very much as works-in-progress.³⁸ From examples within the Dd classmark range, we find James cancelling and rewriting his collation formulae;³⁹ changing the description of the contents or the title of the manuscript;⁴⁰ rearranging the layout of the description;⁴¹ amending the provenance;⁴² deleting part of his transcription of the text;⁴³ or revising his assessment of the number of and description of scribal hands.⁴⁴ James's use of the backs of these forms, additional blank sheets or even scrap paper likewise suggests they were the basis for further revision or writing up—not for sending to press, let alone for use as a finished resource.⁴⁵ As Jayne Ringrose has recorded, it was soon

³⁸ For example: for MS Ii.1.21, by following the pre-printed template James's description provides a more orderly description of the manuscript's physical attributes under a series of headings, rather than a continuous statement in prose. James included crucial details—the foremost being collation and provenance—that were not covered by the earlier catalogue: he noted a Norwich priory shelfmark on fo. 3^r, and included the reference number used by Thomas James in his *Ecloga* of 1600, the 'Greek letter' classmark used by the University Library in the 17th century, as well as another Library classmark, 'Class 7 Occ 2.7.5'. He also identified the author and the text (Origen's Homilies on Leviticus), which his predecessor failed to do (which he also noted); instead, the cataloguer had simply transcribed the rubric found on fo. 3^r, without mentioning its location in the manuscript (which James did). James likewise gave folio references for the incipit and explicit, noted details concerning the presentation of the text (running headers, varying scribal rubrics) as well as the presence of later, fifteenth-century marginalia.

³⁹ Descriptions of MSS Dd.1.5, Dd.1.6, Dd.4.39, Dd.6.12, Dd.8.2, Dd.8.41, Dd.12.41, Dd.15.27.

⁴⁰ Descriptions of MSS Dd.5.2, Dd.5.5, Dd.5.46, Dd.5.53, Dd.6.29, Dd.7.4, Dd.7.11, Dd.8.18, Dd.8.19, Dd.8.41, Dd.9.38, Dd.9.69, Dd.9.71, Dd.10.16, Dd.10.21, Dd.11.78, Dd.11.82, Dd.12.61, Dd.15.25.

⁴¹ Description of MS Dd.5.53.

⁴² Description of MS Dd.4.63.

⁴³ Descriptions of MS Dd.5.64, Dd.5.76.

⁴⁴ Description of MS Dd.9.5.

⁴⁵ For example, the reverse of one sheet of the description for MS Hh.1.3 contains what appears to be a fragment of the opening of a speech given at Eton; there are other, partial notes relating to Eton on the reverse of the description of MS Mm.5.37; and on the reverse of that for MS Add. 6006, there are notes relating to his examination of and attempt to date a manuscript in private possession.

discovered that these ‘six boxfuls of scarcely legible pencil drafts’ were an inadequate foundation for a new catalogue. The difficulty encountered in trying to make sense of James’s notes, the lack of satisfactory descriptions of the legal manuscripts, and the disruption to Library business by the commencement of the war all conspired to forestall any imminent plans for publication.⁴⁶

B. F. C. Atkinson and A. E. B. Owen

Basil Atkinson was appointed Third Under-Librarian on 1 October 1925, with responsibility for the Department of Manuscripts. His initial involvement with the medieval manuscripts was as part of James’s cataloguing project: it is Atkinson’s hand that added, in ink, basic details about the manuscripts—classmark, size, language, material, and number of leaves, columns and lines to a page—to the pre-printed forms that were later completed by James in pencil. His responsibilities spanned both the medieval and post-medieval material, however, with descriptions of both in his hand among the unpublished papers, on the same or similar versions of the pre-printed forms that had been used by James.

Since James had excluded legal manuscripts from his cataloguing work, steps were taken while his work was ongoing to fill this gap. Olive Farmer of Newnham College was appointed to the task by the Law Faculty but her departure in 1929 for a lectureship at Armstrong College, Newcastle, meant that this initiative was never brought to completion.⁴⁷ Soon after James had finished, the Library sought further contributions or revisions to the catalogue of manuscripts. In 1932, Hermann Kantorowicz had been proposed as Sanders Reader in Bibliography, as inducement to his undertaking to catalogue the Library’s canon and civil law manuscripts, an invitation that he chose to decline.⁴⁸ However, in the same loose-leaf notebook in which Scholfield had set out his ‘AGENDA’ for cataloguing or revising descriptions of the Library’s various manuscript or rare books collections, under the heading ‘LAW’ there is a list of twenty ‘MSS catalogued by Prof. H[ermann]

⁴⁶ Ringrose, ‘Legacy’, 35–6. An attempt c. 1939–45 by the University Typewriting Office to bring his drafts into a form suitable for publication was abandoned. Those transcriptions that were completed have been retained as UA ULIB 7/3/74/82–83.

⁴⁷ Baker and Ringrose, vii.

⁴⁸ UA, Min V 126, *Minutes of the Law Faculty Board 1929–38*, pp. 97, 114, 117, 119; Baker and Ringrose, vii.

Kantorowicz'.⁴⁹ This must have taken place in the six years between Kantorowicz's arrival in Cambridge in 1934 and his death in 1940. The same pre-printed sheets were employed, and those for MSS Gg.6.21 and Mm.4.41 contain basic descriptive information written by Atkinson, with partial descriptions below signed 'H.K.'. The sheets for other manuscripts in this list are entirely in Atkinson's hand and are more complete; though they have Kantorowicz's name inscribed in pencil at the head, comparison of their contents indicates that the work was likely Atkinson's.⁵⁰

Annual departmental reports from 1935–36 onwards reveal that—much to Atkinson's obvious dismay—little cataloguing progress was made in the Department. The arrival of the Jardine Matheson archive 'has necessarily diverted me from the general summary catalogue of the MSS, with which I had been making some progress previously', Atkinson reported. The lamentations continued the following year: 'I become increasingly troubled by the fact that no progress is being made towards a catalogue of the Western MSS as a whole, which is an urgent need.' And the year after that: 'Meanwhile the need for a summary catalogue of our MSS. becomes more and more urgent, sometimes one feels that it is almost desperately urgent.'⁵¹ Yet in 1940, Atkinson reported cheerfully, 'The year has provided a welcome opportunity of proceeding with the summary cataloguing of the MSS, a major work that is overdue.'⁵² The order in which the work was undertaken and its timing nevertheless remain largely unclear: Atkinson neither dated his descriptions, nor distinguished in his annual departmental

⁴⁹ MS Add. 7895/27. The manuscripts are MSS Dd.1.12, 13; Dd.7.12, 13, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21; Dd.8.10, 11; Dd.12.45; Ee.2.5; Ee.5.4; Gg.6.21; Ii.2.17; Mm.4.41; and Add. 3447, 3471, 3472. Of these, ten had already been described by James.

⁵⁰ Only the description of MS Ii.2.7 does not feature Kantorowicz's name. Contrary to an obituary published in the *Law Quarterly Review*, which attributed to Kantorowicz an entire catalogue of canon and civil law manuscripts held at the Library, the unpublished descriptions suggest that this very brief campaign was the extent of his activities: 'A last melancholy duty is to record his unfinished work in the hope that it will not be entirely lost. Having previously catalogued the canonistic and civilian MSS. in Cambridge University Library he was at the time of his death engaged on a similar task at the Bodleian; its non-completion is an almost irreparable loss'. F. de Zulueta, 'Dr. Hermann Kantorowicz', *Law Quarterly Review*, 56 (1940), 171–2 (172).

⁵¹ UA ULIB 1/10/1, *Departmental Reports 1935–36*, p. 31; *1936–37*, p. 17; *1937–38*, 24–5.

⁵² UA ULIB 1/10/2, *Departmental Reports 1938–39*, pp. 22–23; *1939–40*, 16.

reports between cataloguing activity among the medieval manuscripts on one hand and the post-medieval on the other.

The appointment of Arthur Owen on 1 October 1947 appears to have had a decisive effect upon the work of the Department. The following year, Atkinson reported, 'With Owen's assistance our work progressed more rapidly than had ever been possible previously. I had been dealing with the material by subjects, and it had been difficult to gauge what proportion of the work had been completed. It turned out that the back had been broken, and as result of Owen's help I was able to complete the whole of the Dd. class of MSS before the spring of this year.'⁵³ Gaps were filled, though mainly among Dd, Atkinson supplying descriptions mostly of the legal manuscripts that James had elected not to describe.⁵⁴ Where Atkinson's work overlapped with James's, his descriptions were not straightforward copies.⁵⁵ Both the quantity of information differed (details given by James being often left out by Atkinson) as well as the order of its presentation (Atkinson placing provenance information at the end of his notes rather than in proximity to the pre-printed heading 'Binding' as James had done).

Reconstruction of Atkinson's cataloguing work is further complicated by the survival of around seventy descriptions signed 'BFCA' (for Basil Atkinson), but entirely written—initials and all—by the hand of Arthur Owen. Those containing annotations or corrections by Atkinson must have been produced during Owen's first period of employment at the Library, 1947–49.⁵⁶ The others are likely clean copies written out by Owen during that time, since the separation of responsibility for medieval and post-

⁵³ UA ULIB 1/10/3, *Departmental Reports 1947–48*, p. 20. A few years earlier, Atkinson had suggested a similar approach: 'At present I am working on the whole body of MSS in subjects. If however the Syndicate decided to proceed with a new printed Catalogue (which of course is urgently needed), I could turn to the earlier MSS (Dd–) to be included in the first volume'. UA ULIB 1/10/2, *Departmental Reports 1943–44*, pp. 10–11. At the present count, there are descriptions of just over 200 Additional manuscripts and over 70 two-letter manuscripts in Atkinson's hand.

⁵⁴ Among Dd, Atkinson supplied descriptions for 45 manuscripts out of 77 omitted by James; two out of 32 among Ee; three out 38 among Ff; one out of 31 among Hh; three out of fifteen among Ii; five out of 28 among Kk; and one out of eleven among Ll.

⁵⁵ Atkinson supplied descriptions for twenty manuscripts among Dd, two among Ee and one among Ii that had already been described by James.

⁵⁶ See, for example, the descriptions of MSS Dd.7.14 and Dd.12.23.

medieval manuscripts had become formalised by the time of Owen's return in 1961.⁵⁷ However, comparison of Atkinson's with Owen's descriptions indicates that (the initials notwithstanding) these were likely the latter's work, rather than reproductions of the former's. They reflect the conventions and the level and order of detail found in Owen's descriptions of post-medieval manuscripts, differences confirmed in the half dozen instances where descriptions of the same manuscript by both men are found.⁵⁸

In 1949, Owen left the Library for a post with the Historical Manuscripts Commission. 'The department is now under the shadow of his departure from the Library for other work,' Atkinson reported; 'The help of an intelligent assistant is essential if our plans are to be carried out and if we are to escape relapse to the slow difficult progress of a one-man department.'⁵⁹ While the lack of replacement for Owen might well have been regretted, the Department was in fact already in possession of just such an 'intelligent assistant'.

H. L. Pink

An outline of the career of Harold Leslie Pink—at 53 years, perhaps the longest in the Library's history—has already been set down in an obituary by Arthur Owen, and an acknowledgement of his contribution towards the description of manuscripts made in Jayne Ringrose's introduction to her catalogue of the Additional manuscripts.⁶⁰ Pink was responsible for the running of Room Theta in the Old Library from 1925, and then, following the move to the new building, for the Anderson Room, where the manuscripts (among other special collections) were consulted. Promoted to Assistant Under-Librarian in June 1947, he began working under Basil Atkinson on 1 October 1947, at the same time as Arthur Owen. After a brief stint with the post-medieval manuscripts, Pink began by revising

⁵⁷ UA ULIB 1/10/5, *Departmental Reports 1960–61*, pp. 55–57.

⁵⁸ See the descriptions of MSS Dd.7.17, Dd.7.18, Dd.7.19, Dd.7.21, Add. 1879(17).

⁵⁹ The sharp tapering off in numbers of descriptions in his hand of manuscripts among Ee–Oo confirms that Atkinson made little further progress himself over the ten years prior to his retirement in 1960.

⁶⁰ A. E. B. Owen, 'H. L. Pink (1902–1988)', *Cambridge University Library Staff Bulletin*, 531, 1989, 4–6; Ringrose, *Summary catalogue*, vii–ix.

James's descriptions of the Additional in 1948.⁶¹ Atkinson's reports suggest work on this part of the collection continued until at least 1955, by which time Pink was 'occupied with fragments etc., [and] what he calls "odds and ends"'; thereafter, neither Atkinson's nor Pink's reports specify which part of the collection was being dealt with.⁶²

What support—if any—Pink was given in undertaking this task is unclear, and what formal training he had received—if any—since he had left school in 1917 aged fourteen in order to work as a 'Library boy' is similarly unknown. According to the Syndicate minutes, on 24 November 1948, 'The Librarian was further directed to prepare...(b) a set of general instructions for the cataloguing of the post-mediaeval manuscripts', no doubt as a consequence of Arthur Owen's work in the Department.⁶³ As for the medieval manuscripts, Roger Mynors (then a Library Syndic) 'was encouraging and laid down guidelines', but since these do not survive it is not known precisely what they comprised, or how the two men co-ordinated their work.⁶⁴ Perhaps unsurprisingly, the demands of the task weighed heavily upon Pink, with Atkinson reporting 'a serious breakdown in health' within his first year: 'Mr Pink, as is well known, does not take his work lightly...[and] it may be necessary for the next few months to urge him from time to time not to overwork himself.'⁶⁵ Two years later, Atkinson noted of Pink's progress, 'The work is slow, as in spite of flare [sic] for palaeography and an almost superhuman knowledge of our MSS, Pink is hampered by the lack of a background of historical scholarship.'⁶⁶ The brevity of Atkinson's subsequent reports suggests he avoided placing any further pressure on his subordinate by setting targets for the completion of this work. Pink's own annual reports, issued once he took over from Atkinson as the Head of Manuscripts in 1960 and until his retirement in 1970, were similarly laconic.

⁶¹ UA ULIB 1/10/3, *Departmental Reports 1947–48*, p. 20.

⁶² UA ULIB 1/10/3, *Departmental Reports 1954–55*, p. 28.

⁶³ UA ULIB 1/2/7, *Syndicate Minutes*, vol. 7, 1934–49.

⁶⁴ Ringrose, *Summary catalogue*, vii. Mynors must have had some ongoing oversight of the project, since Atkinson requested the assistance, with regard to the post-medieval manuscripts, 'of a general editor with final authority to decide format, length, etc., someone perhaps to occupy the same position in relation to them as Professor Mynors does for the mediaeval': UA ULIB 1/10/3, *Departmental Reports 1948–49*, p. 15.

⁶⁵ UA ULIB 1/10/3, *Departmental Reports 1947–48*, p. 21.

⁶⁶ UA ULIB 1/10/3, *Departmental Reports 1949–50*, p. 14.

Harold Pink's handwriting will probably already be familiar to readers who have consulted manuscripts at the University Library. Unlike James, Pink was highly attentive to the details of a manuscript's structure. He provided (or perhaps transcribed) a collation formula in his handwritten descriptions and on the rear pastedown or endleaf of a manuscript—the latter being a practice initiated by Bradshaw, whose conventions Pink faithfully followed.⁶⁷ Taught perhaps by Atkinson, or more likely Mynors, Pink's collation formulae typically follow a more consistent standard than James's, and usually refer to pre-existing quire or leaf signatures where present as a means of 'numbering' each quire. With a large-scale programme of rebinding having begun in the 1950s, Pink in all likelihood benefitted from the kind of direct access to a book's structure that Bradshaw had permitted himself.⁶⁸ In very many instances, Pink also noted the date and person responsible for the repair or rebinding of a manuscript on the front pastedown or endleaf of a manuscript.⁶⁹

Pink's handwriting is also found on many of James's descriptions, which he (and others) treated as a sort of running file on each manuscript, where

⁶⁷ For an overview of these, see: Beadle, 40–44. The collation formula and other annotations in MS Ll.1.18 that are reproduced in Plates 7–11 were written by Pink.

⁶⁸ For Bradshaw disbinding and rebinding manuscripts in order to (in his words) 'get at the truth about it', see: G. W. Prothero, *A memoir of Henry Bradshaw: fellow of King's College, Cambridge, and University Librarian* (London, 1888), 336–7. In certain instances, Pink took the opportunity presented by the repair or rebinding of manuscripts to correct previous misbinding of leaves or quires. See, for example, MS Ff.4.9: Pink provided a collation formula and noted the manuscript's rearrangement on the first rear endleaf, presumably after the manuscript was rebaked by Gray's in 1962 (stamp and date on the front pastedown). The misbinding of the manuscript had earlier been noted by Bradshaw in a note and quire diagrams on the rear pastedown ('E8 misplaced'). Also, MS Ii.1.17: the unpublished description of the manuscript by M. R. James (UA ULIB 7/3/74/39) notes 'the last quire bound upside down'. The book was repaired by W. H. Smith in June 1962, which was presumably when this was corrected. (My thanks to David McKitterick for drawing these examples to my attention). Pink also foliated many of the University Library's manuscripts—a task closely tied to their collation—and likewise ultimately adhered to practices first introduced by Bradshaw. A note on the University Library's idiosyncratic foliation practices, in which Pink's work will be discussed in further detail, is in preparation.

⁶⁹ For an example of a re-binding note and collation formula written by Pink, see: MS Ll.5.18, front pastedown, <https://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/view/MS-LL-00005-00018/2>, and rear pastedown, <https://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/view/MS-LL-00005-00018/109> (accessed 16 April 2020).

information could be kept prior to the compilation of a fresh description.⁷⁰ The sometimes cramped and crowded layout of these descriptions, plus James's illegible handwriting and his apparent tendency never to sharpen his pencil unless absolutely necessary, mean that Pink's annotations are not always easily spotted. The most common are straightforwardly bibliographical. James's references to publications were frequently glossed by Pink with the relevant University Library classmark, suggesting a degree of background reading and research into the manuscripts.⁷¹ Pink also included references that James, being based in Eton and without access to the full facilities of a research library, had overlooked.⁷² He further supplemented the bibliography with publications issued since 1930, in particular noting editions of texts contained in University Library manuscripts, together with the *siglum* used by the editors to refer to the Library's copy.⁷³ Contacts he had developed with readers, and intelligence relating to forthcoming publications, were also written down.⁷⁴ James's descriptions were subject to ongoing revision, with further additions being made by Arthur Owen and other members of Library staff, who in some cases made corrections to Pink's own annotations.⁷⁵

Though it is difficult at such remove to discern any systematic approach to the revision of the descriptions, clearly Pink engaged in close comparison of James's notes with the manuscripts themselves with the aim of addressing, as Jayne Ringrose put it, 'James's famed lack of care for details' or supplementing them with information that had become available in the years since James had ceased work.⁷⁶ For example, Pink corrected misreadings, mistranscriptions and omissions, both major and

⁷⁰ The most prolific of these annotators was Pink, but there are also notes by J. C. T. Oates, A. E. B. Owen, R. A. B. Mynors as well as by other hands yet to be identified.

⁷¹ See, for example, James's descriptions of MSS Dd.1.28, Ff.4.31, Ff.4.41, Ff.4.43, li.2.19 and Ll.5.21.

⁷² See, for example, James's descriptions of MSS Ff.5.48, Ff.6.4 and Gg.6.42.

⁷³ See, for example, James's descriptions of MSS Ff.1.24, Ff.1.25(3), Ff.1.25(4), Ff.6.13, Gg.4.18, Gg.6.20, Kk.4.6, Nn.3.13, Nn.3.14.

⁷⁴ See, for example, James's descriptions of MSS Ee.1.10, Ff.6.13 and Gg.1.17.

⁷⁵ See, among Dd for example, James's descriptions of MSS Dd of Dd.4.24, Dd.6.6, Dd.8.12, Dd.10.22, Dd.11.79, Dd.12.25, Dd.15.24 and Dd.15.27, and, for corrections to Pink's annotations, James's descriptions of MSS Ff.1.24, Gg.4.12, Mm.5.31.

⁷⁶ Ringrose, 'Legacy' 36.

minor, in numerous instances.⁷⁷ He noted texts that James had overlooked, and updated or clarified the identification of authors in light of new scholarship.⁷⁸ Similarly, Pink checked James's attributions of provenance, often correcting them with reference either to subsequent publications or evidence in the manuscripts that James had overlooked.⁷⁹ Where Pink had refoliated a manuscript, he took care to go back to the descriptions and amend the references that James had used, in order that they should correspond to the new numbering.⁸⁰

As his retirement neared, Pink submitted three separate reports on his cataloguing activities, listing 344 manuscripts in the two-letter sequence and 220 among the Additional for which he had provided descriptions.⁸¹ Though they are not differentiated in Pink's list, a further 95 Additional manuscripts were described by Roger Mynors. Their descriptions follow the

⁷⁷ See, for example, James's descriptions of MSS Dd.1.6, Dd.5.55, Dd.6.6, Dd.8.18, Ff.5.45, Ff.5.48.

⁷⁸ For example: in James's description of MS Ff.6.31, '101^b A six line stanza "quod y^e devill to y^e frier"', giving the date ('xvi') and a reference to the *Index of Middle English Verse* ('IMEV 2531'). For examples of changes to authorial identifications, see James's descriptions of MSS Ee.6.20, Ff.1.12, Hh.4.13, Mm.2.10, Mm.5.33.

⁷⁹ For corrections derived from publications, see James's descriptions of MSS Dd.4.17, Dd.9.6, Dd.10.22, Gg.4.27 and Ii.5.44. For corrections arising from study of the manuscripts, see James's descriptions of MSS Ee.2.33, Ee.4.33, Ff.2.40, Ii.1.23, Add. 3062.

⁸⁰ See, for example, James's descriptions of MSS Dd.10.62, Dd.12.56, Dd. 15.16, Ee.5.13, Ee.5.32, Ff.1.19, Hh.1.3, Hh.3.13, Hh.3.16, Hh.4.12, Ii.1.15, Mm.2.9.

⁸¹ UA ULIB 1/10/8, *Departmental Reports 1967–68*, pp. 68, [68a, 68b]; *Departmental Reports 1969–70*, p. 60. One description, for MS Mm.3.4, has gone missing. Descriptions of nine two-letter and two Additional manuscripts listed by Pink in these reports are not to be found in the boxes, however these were all described by Pink for G. R. C. Davis's survey of medieval cartularies: MSS Ff.2.29, Ff.2.33, Ff.4.35, Ii.6.32, Kk.5.29, Ll.1.10, Mm.2.20, Mm.4.19, Mm.5.35, Add. 4407(12), Add. 6874. '[I]t is proposed to use these general descriptions,' Pink concluded: UA ULIB 1/10/8, *Departmental Reports 1967–68*, p. [68b]. However, there do remain in the boxes descriptions of six other manuscripts which were also marked as having been described for Davis: MSS Gg.4.4, Add. 3020, Add. 3021, Add. 3468, Add. 4220, Add. 6845. In his penultimate report, Pink acknowledged that 'it now seems unlikely that I shall fulfil my ambition to complete the catalogue by the time I retire at the end of the next academical year', but, being 'still alert both mentally and physically... would welcome the opportunity to complete it on a voluntary basis.' According to Owen's obituary, however, it was 'wholly unexpected when, twelve months later...he abruptly withdrew the offer on being told it was impossible to pay him for the work'.

same template, comprising first a physical description (material, dimensions, number of leaves, number of columns and lines, date, script and decoration, collation, catchwords and binding), the *dicta probatoria* (the opening words of the second folio), a list of the contents (with notes concerning any annotations, as well as published editions), and finally provenance.

None of those involved in the cataloguing of medieval manuscripts at the University Library was able to complete the description of even a subset of the collection to a standard that was subsequently judged acceptable for publication. Though Harold Pink was initially tasked with revising James's drafts for publication, it rapidly became apparent that more thoroughgoing work was required. 'It has been found impossible to revise satisfactorily the catalogue [of the Additional] left by Dr M. R. James, and Mr Pink is undertaking what amounts to a new catalogue,' Atkinson reported in 1952; four years later, by which time Pink appears to have commenced work on the two-letter manuscripts, Atkinson confessed his disappointment 'that it is not yet finished, but he [Pink] found at the start that he was unable to base his work on that of M. R. James and that he had to start everything *de novo*'.⁸² In turn, the descriptions produced by Pink were found to fall short: 'Pink was a conscientious and careful worker,' Arthur Owen commented in a somewhat patronising obituary of his former colleague, 'but his previous experience of the medieval manuscripts had been essentially (for want of a better word) external. With hindsight, something more than the skills of a bibliographer was needed for re-casting James... It became clear after Pink's retirement that he had too readily taken James's statements on trust, and that still further work was needed before publication could be considered.'⁸³

⁸² UA ULIB 1/10/3, *Departmental Reports 1951–52*, p. 9; UA ULIB 1/10/4, *Departmental Reports 1955–56*, p. 23. This was later echoed by Jayne Ringrose: 'It must be admitted... that such has been the amount of re-casting of earlier descriptions, whether by James, Pink or Mynors, that the work may be said to have been done anew.' See: Ringrose, *Summary catalogue*, viii.

⁸³ Owen, 5–6. Owen had earlier issued a rather damning assessment of Atkinson's work, following his predecessor's retirement: 'Dr Atkinson's work has made my own a great deal easier, but after sampling his descriptions I am obliged to report that all will require to be checked most carefully before they are suitable for publication, and much of the work will undoubtedly have to be done again. A high proportion of the descriptions sampled have been found unreliable or unsatisfactory in some way; the bibliography is often inadequate.' UA ULIB 1/10/5, *Departmental Reports 1960–61*, p. 56.

These inadequacies notwithstanding, in certain instances scholars might find the information that these descriptions contain of some use—but as unfinished, unpublished, unreviewed pieces of work they must be treated cautiously and only as a starting-point for further examination of the manuscripts themselves. It is ironic that these imperfections prevented the descriptions' publication but ensured their preservation. By setting them aside as the basis for further revision in the future, the Library unintentionally retained evidence of the evolution of the discipline of descriptive cataloguing of medieval manuscripts, and the methodologies of those engaged in this work. In the case of M. R. James, whose distinctive position in this history of the field will inevitably prompt further study, this record may well be unique. There exist some of James's working notes on manuscripts (including those at the University Library) in notebooks preserved at the Fitzwilliam Museum, though their precise relationship to his published descriptive catalogues remains to be explored.⁸⁴ However, for none of his publications is such a volume of preparatory work known to survive; had clean copies been prepared for the press, the drafts would likely have been discarded. This evidence may prove valuable to any future history of the development of the discipline of manuscript cataloguing.

The usefulness of individual descriptions depends variously on James's interests and whether or not the information they contain has been superseded by subsequent scholarly attention. As a whole, however, these drafts offer insights into the methodology of one of the foremost manuscript scholars of the modern era. James did much to codify and formalise in print the description of medieval manuscripts—a template that has been much revised and developed, but which has been followed in its fundamentals to the present day.⁸⁵ The maturing of digital technologies

⁸⁴ Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum, JAMES/1/1. My thanks to Peter Jones for information on this point.

⁸⁵ There remains, in the Anglophone world at least, no agreed standard for the descriptive cataloguing of medieval manuscripts. Neil Ker's 'sixteen points' is perhaps the best known attempt to set out the fundamental principles: Ker, xx–xxiii. On their development prior to publication, see: A. I. Doyle, 'Introduction to Neil Ker's elements of medieval English codicology', *English Manuscript Studies: 1100–1700*, 14 (2008), 244–50. For a useful bibliography, summarising developments in descriptive cataloguing during the nineteenth and centuries, as well as national variations, see: G. A. Pass, *Descriptive cataloging of ancient, medieval, renaissance, and early modern manuscripts* (Chicago, 2003), 132–41.

in the field of descriptive cataloguing and medieval manuscripts studies is prompting scholars to recognise and reflect upon their potential, both creative and disruptive. The history of medieval manuscript cataloguing is only now beginning to be written—and it is a history that has so far been mostly based on its printed, published manifestations.⁸⁶ The unpublished descriptions held at the University Library, and those in other repositories, ought also to form part of that story, since the shortcomings and successes of such initiatives are prompting curators and scholars to reflect critically upon the evolution and purpose of descriptive cataloguing and to make the case for future directions, whether printed or digital.

The unpublished descriptions also provide insights into the Library's own institutional history: the way in which the medieval manuscripts were administered, their status and position within the Library's collections as a whole, and what value (or not) such historic material possessed within the context of a legal deposit library whose focus was catering to the needs of scholars across the University. They also illustrate how a large institutional library sought to respond to developments in the discipline and different expectations among its readers. They prompt us to consider in what ways during the twentieth century, and with what success, the University Library was able either to co-opt academics such as M. R. James and R. A. B. Mynors or to enable its own members of staff to adopt and adapt to new scholarly descriptive practices.

The difficulty of keeping 'abreast of the increased knowledge of the present day' that James identified in 1904 only accelerated as the century wore on. As ideas about the contents, scope and appropriate level of detail in a description evolved quickly, Library staff must have found the ground continually shifting underneath their feet. While the Department's various card indexes may have facilitated access to the collection or supplied information lacking in the nineteenth-century catalogue, their creation

⁸⁶ See, for example, R. Hanna, 'Manuscript catalogues and book history', *The Library*, 7th ser., 18 (2017), 45–61, <https://doi.org/10.1093/library/18.1.45> (accessed 16 Apr. 2020). A very recent survey by Orietta da Rold has encompassed both unpublished descriptions and developments in the digital sphere: 'Tradition and innovation in cataloguing medieval manuscripts', *Anglia*, 139 (2021), 32–58, <https://doi.org/10.1515/ang-2021-0003> (accessed 21 Apr. 2021).

and maintenance ran counter to the cataloguing of the manuscripts.⁸⁷ By multiplying scattered, imperfectly co-ordinated notes, they fragmented the information available and diverted staff from bringing descriptions to a standard suitable for publication. That the task of cataloguing was repeatedly entrusted to a single person—whose time was split between a task requiring considerable time, focus and intellectual resources and the many other administrative and curatorial responsibilities that his position bore—made a glacial rate of progress inevitable. Against such obstacles, the achievements of Harold Pink in particular are all the more commendable, and deserving of greater recognition.

A lack of adequate training meant that members of staff often began their work ill-equipped to meet its challenges. The absence of any institutional oversight of their work meant furthermore that no interventions were made to improve the standard of their descriptions during the period of their employment. The consequences were particularly acute in the case of James, who worked independently of the Library (though in its pay), in declining health and without an adequate reference library to hand, but whose considerable scholarly reputation may have deterred any questioning of his output, even by the formidable Scholfield. After seventy years' work, by several individuals, preparing often multiple descriptions of the medieval manuscripts, the Library was left with a stock of unpublished—and, in Arthur Owen's eyes at least, unpublishable—descriptions.⁸⁸ A further thirty

⁸⁷ An index of provenance information—entitled 'Owners and Donors' in a note dated by Sayle to 17 March 1903—is kept in two boxes on the open reference shelves in the Manuscripts Reading Room. It was presumably created on or around that date, and appears to have been conceived initially for use with respect to the Additional manuscripts. Cards were later added by Atkinson, and to a lesser extent Pink, and its scope was broadened to include manuscripts in the two-letter classmark sequence. Further provenance information is also recorded on cards in drawers in the main card index in the Manuscripts Reading Room. Also apparently begun by Sayle, this appears to have been an attempt to expand the scope of the index of the nineteenth-century catalogue (largely an *index nominorum et locorum*) with subject, language and some provenance information. A further card index of incipits, divided by language and in alphabetical order, and encompassing manuscripts at both the University Library and the colleges, was also introduced. Most of the cards were written by Atkinson, and the Annual Reports suggest that much of his time was spent in indexing work.

⁸⁸ The unfairness of this assessment of Pink's work is illustrated by the degree to which subsequent publications have drawn on Pink's descriptions, and silently absorbed many of his observations about the manuscripts.

years' work was required before a summary catalogue of the Additional manuscripts was produced, a task initially begun more than a century earlier.⁸⁹ For the two-letter manuscripts there remains as yet no further, comprehensive update on the descriptions offered by the nineteenth-century catalogue. It is hard to escape the conclusion that with better planning, and sufficient resources, this time could have been much better spent.

Curators are, either by disposition or by training, inclined to be long-sighted. Preoccupation with the preservation of the material under our care can mean that the value of the history under our noses is not always in sharpest focus. Other than by word of mouth, scholars have had no means of discovering the collections of unpublished descriptions, understanding their scope or coverage, or referencing them formally in their work. To those in the know, the notes have been made available on request at the desk in the Manuscripts Reading Room. However, without official incorporation into the collection, and therefore any kind of classmark, and housed outside the secure stacks, the unpublished descriptions have to date occupied an ambiguous and potentially vulnerable position within the Library as an unaccessioned part-archive, part-reference collection. The physical deterioration of James's drafts is in some cases severe—a reflection of their use during the twentieth century as they made the gradual transition from a set of working documents to a unique archive of unpublished work on our own collection by a scholar whose work was instrumental in formalising in print the method and structure of manuscript description.

Most recently, the unpublished descriptions had been stored in the offices of the Department of Rare Books and Early Manuscripts. Charles Sayle's, Basil Atkinson's and Arthur Owen's descriptions were kept together in one set of boxes. They were arranged in classmark order and, in many instances, descriptions of the same manuscript by Sayle and Atkinson had been stapled together, reflecting their later use as a reference resource rather than the circumstances of their creation. M. R. James's descriptions were kept in a second set of boxes, but reflect a similar pattern of use. During the decades since the end of Jayne Ringrose's account, they formed the locus around which a departmental reference collection coalesced. Besides

⁸⁹ But even here it was decided that certain details should be omitted, including some—most notably collation—that had routinely featured in earlier unpublished drafts, in order that a printed catalogue finally be brought to fruition. See: Ringrose, *Summary catalogue*, viii.

the drafts themselves—kept mostly in classmark order—the boxes also contained an assortment of other material relating to the manuscripts: journal offprints (often inscribed as donations by their authors), correspondence sent and received, photocopies (particularly of descriptions found in other catalogues), scraps of paper bearing notes by readers or curators and other miscellanea.⁹⁰ These were usually kept in a folder along with the description itself.⁹¹ Finally, H. L. Pink's and R. A. B. Mynors' descriptions were kept together, again in classmark order, in a third set of boxes.

In order to secure the collection's long-term preservation, to limit their further deterioration, and facilitate their consultation by readers, each of these sets of unpublished descriptions has been accessioned into the University Archives, under the following classmarks:

- UA ULIB 7/3/72: Descriptions by C. E. Sayle, B. F. C. Atkinson and A. E. B. Owen, with notes by other hands.
- UA ULIB 7/3/73: 'Catalogue of Western MSS' in three volumes.
- UA ULIB 7/3/74: Descriptions by M. R. James, including typescripts of selected descriptions produced by the University Press.
- UA ULIB 7/3/75: Descriptions by H. L. Pink and R. A. B. Mynors.
- UA ULIB 7/3/76: Descriptions by R. V. Kerr.

As the decades passed, James's notes became increasingly overwhelmed by the accretion of various accompanying materials, and since the collection grew organically, with no apparent formal policy or procedure for accessions or weeding, the quantity and subject-matter of these materials varies from manuscript to manuscript. They have therefore been dealt with separately, as follows. Photocopies of publications have been weeded and references added to the departmental bibliography. Correspondence and handwritten notes that contain information not known to have been published have been retained, along with inscribed off-prints, in new departmental running files. These may be made available to readers on request, on a case-by-case basis.

⁹⁰ Several descriptions of Greek manuscripts were kept in a separate folder, probably reflecting the separate work on that collection by R. V. Kerr. Some notes by Henry Bradshaw were also found in the files for MSS Ee.2.15, Ee.4.20 and MS Gg.4.27(1).

⁹¹ Such a large quantity of accompanying material concerned MS Gg.5.35 that it was kept in a separate box with James's description.

Subject guides relating to these unpublished descriptions have also been published on the University Library website.⁹² As well as a summary introduction to the collection, the guide provides tables that describe the coverage of the descriptions by each author. In light of the difficulties involved in deciphering James's handwriting, and with a view to making the contents of the descriptions available to a wider readership, a project was initiated several years ago to produce complete transcriptions of this collection. Thanks to the efforts of Jayne Ringrose, Martin Blake, Lorenzo Fernandez-Vincente and Robin Payne, more than half of the descriptions were typed up into Word documents by 2013. As with the originals, however, none of these transcriptions was made available, except on an informal, ad hoc basis. All of the existing transcriptions have been converted into pdf files and are now available to download via the subject guide and Apollo.⁹³ Photocopies of Pink's and Mynors' descriptions, also found in the Department, have now been scanned and made available in similar manner.⁹⁴

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⁹² See: <https://www.lib.cam.ac.uk/collections/departments/manuscripts-universityarchives/subject-guides/unpublished-descriptions>. Please contact the author for further information.

⁹³ 'Transcriptions of Unpublished Descriptions of the Western Medieval Manuscripts at Cambridge University Library by M.R. James (1862-1936)' <https://www.repository.cam.ac.uk/handle/1810/319950> (accessed 21 Apr. 2021).

⁹⁴ 'Unpublished Descriptions of the Western Medieval Manuscripts at Cambridge University Library by H.L. Pink (1902-1988) and R.A.B. Mynors (1903-1989)' <https://www.repository.cam.ac.uk/handle/1810/319896> (accessed 21 Apr. 2021).